The sunny banks of the River Lethe

Hugh Forester always remembered everything. He remembered the dates of the Battle of New Cold Harbour (31 May–12 June, 1864); he remembered the name of his teacher in the first grade (Webel; red-haired; weight, one-forty-five; no eyelashes); he remembered the record number of strike-outs in one game in the National League (Dizzy Dean, St Louis Cards, 30 July, 1933, seventeen men, against the Cubs); he remembered the fifth line of 'To a Skylark' (Shelley: 'In profuse strains of unpremeditated art'); he remembered the address of the first girl he ever kissed (Prudence Collingwood, 248 East South Temple Street, Salt Lake City, Utah; 14 March, 1918); he remembered the dates of the three partitions of Poland and the destruction of the Temple (1772, 1793, 1795, and AD 70); he remembered the number of ships taken by Nelson at the Battle of Trafalgar (twenty), and the profession of the hero of Frank Norris's novel *McTeague* (dentist); he remembered the name of the man who won the Pulitzer Prize for history in 1925 (Frederic L. Paxson), the name of the Derby winner at Epsom in 1923 (Papyrus), and the number he drew in the draft in 1940 (4726); he remembered the figures for his blood pressure (a hundred and sixty-five over ninety; too high), his blood type (O), and his vision (forty over twenty for the right eye and thirty over twenty for the left); he remembered what his boss told him when he was fired from his first job ('I'm getting a machine to do the job'), and what his wife said when he proposed to her ('I want to live in New York'); he remembered the correct name of Lenin (Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov), and what caused the death of Louis XIV (gangrene of the leg). He also remembered the species of birds, the mean depths of the navigable rivers of America; the names, given and assumed, of all the Popes, including the ones at Avignon; the batting averages of Harry Heilmann and Heinie Groh; the dates of the total eclipses of the

sun since the reign of Charlemagne; the speed of sound; the location of the tomb of D. H. Lawrence; all of the *Rubáiyát* of Omar Khayyám; the population of the lost settlement of Roanoke; the rate of fire of the Browning automatic rifle; the campaigns of Caesar in Gaul and Britain; the name of the shepherdess in *As You Like It* and the amount of money he had in the Chemical Bank and Trust on the morning of 7 December, 1941 (2,367.58 dollars).

Then he forgot his twenty-fourth wedding anniversary (25 January). His wife, Narcisse, looked at him strangely over breakfast that morning, but he was reading the previous night's newspaper and thinking, they will never get it straight in Washington, and he didn't pay much attention. There was a letter from their son, who was at the University of Alabama, but he put it in his pocket without opening it. It was addressed only to him, so he knew it was a request for money. When Morton wrote his dutiful, familial notes they were addressed to both his parents. Morton was at Alabama because his marks had not been high enough to get him into Yale, Dartmouth, Williams, Antioch, the College of the City of New York, or the University of Colorado.

Narcisse asked if Hugh wanted fish for dinner and he said yes, and Narcisse said that fish was criminally expensive, too, and he said yes, and she asked if anything was the matter and he said no and kissed her and walked out of the apartment to the 242nd Street subway station and stood all the way down to the office, reading the morning newspaper. Narcisse's parents had lived in France for some time and that was where the name came from; by now he was used to it. As he read his newspaper in the crowded car he wished, mildly, that most of the people whom people wrote about in the newspapers would vanish.

Hugh was the first one in the office, and he went to his cubbyhole and sat at his desk, leaving the door open, enjoying the empty desks and the sound of silence. He remembered that Narcisse's nose had twitched at the breakfast table and that she had seemed about to cry. He wondered briefly why, but knew that he would be told in good time, and dismissed it. Narcisse cried between five and eight times a month.

The company for which he worked was putting out a one-

volume encyclopaedia, absolutely complete, on India paper, with seven hundred and fifty illustrations. There was some talk of its being called the Giant Pocket Encyclopaedia, but no final decision had as yet been reached. Hugh was working on the 'S's. Today he had Soap, Sodium, Sophocles, and Sorrento before him. He remembered that Maxim Gorki had lived in Sorrento, and that of the hundred and twenty-three plays that Sophocles wrote, only seven had been discovered. Hugh was not actually unhappy at his work except when Mr Gorsline appeared. Mr Gorsline was the owner and editor-in-chief of the house, and believed in standing behind the backs of his employees, silently watching them at their labours. Whenever Mr Gorsline came into the room, Hugh had the curious feeling that blood was running slowly over his groin.

Mr Gorsline was grey-haired, wore tweed suits, had the face and figure of a picador, and had started with calendars. The house still put out a great variety of calendars – pornographic, religious and occasional. Hugh was very useful on calendars because he remembered things like the death of Oliver Cromwell (3 September, 1658) and the date on which Marconi sent the first wireless message across the Atlantic (12 December, 1901) and the date of the first steamboat run from New York to Albany (17 August, 1807).

Mr Gorsline appreciated Hugh's peculiar talents and was relentlessly paternal about his welfare. Mr Gorsline was a believer in homœpathic medicines and the health-giving properties of raw vegetables, particularly egg-plant. He was also opposed to glasses, having thrown his away in 1944 after reading a book about a series of exercises for the muscles of the eyes. He had persuaded Hugh to discard his glasses for a period of seven months in 1948, during which time Hugh had suffered from continual headaches, for which Mr Gorsline had prescribed minute doses of a medicine from a homœpathic pharmacy which made Hugh feel as though he had been hit in the skull with birdshot. Now whenever Mr Gorsline stood behind Hugh, he stared at Hugh's glasses with the stubborn, Irredentist expression of an Italian general surveying Trieste. Hugh's health, while not actively bad, was shabby. He had frequent, moist colds, and his eyes had

a tendency to become bloodshot after lunch. There was no hiding these lapses or the fact that in cold weather he had to make several trips an hour to the men's room. At such times, Mr Gorsline would break his customary silence to outline diets designed to improve the tone of the nasal passages, the eyes and the kidneys.

During the morning, Mr Gorsline came into Hugh's room twice. The first time, he stood behind Hugh's chair without saying a word for five minutes, then said, 'Still on sodium?' and left. The next time, he stood silently for eight minutes, then said, 'Forester, you're putting on weight. White bread,' and left. Each time, Hugh had the familiar feeling in the groin.

Just before lunch, Hugh's daughter came into his office. She kissed him and said, 'Many happy returns of the day, Daddy,' and gave him a small oblong package with a bow of coloured ribbon on top of it. Clare was twenty-two and had been married four years but she refused to stop saying 'Daddy'. Hugh opened the package, feeling confused. There was a gold-topped fountain pen in it. It was the fourth fountain pen Clare had given him in the last six years, two on birthdays and the third on Christmas. She had not inherited her father's memory.

'What's this for?' Hugh asked.

'Daddy!' Clare said. 'You're kidding.'

Hugh stared at the pen. He knew it wasn't his birthday (12 June). And it certainly wasn't Christmas (25 December).

'It can't be,' Clare said incredulously. 'You didn't *forget*!'

Hugh remembered Narcisse's face at breakfast, and the twitching of her nose. 'Oh, my,' he said.

'You better load yourself with flowers before you set foot in the house tonight,' Clare said. She peered anxiously at her father. 'Daddy, are you all right?' she asked.

'Of course I'm all right,' Hugh said, annoyed. 'Everybody forgets an anniversary once in a while.'

'Not you, Daddy.'

'Me, too. I'm human, too,' he said, but he felt shaken. He unscrewed the top of the pen and wrote TWENTY-FOUR YEARS, in capitals, on a pad, keeping his head down. He now owned eight

fountain pens. 'It's just what I needed, Clare,' he said, and put it in his pocket. 'Thank you very much.'

'You haven't forgotten that you promised to take me to lunch, have you?' Clare had phoned the day before to make the appointment for lunch, because, she told Hugh, she had some serious problems to discuss.

'Of course not,' Hugh said briskly. He put on his overcoat, and they went out together. Hugh ordered sole, then changed to a lamb chop, because he remembered that Narcisse had said at breakfast they were to have fish for dinner. Clare ordered roast chicken and Waldorf salad, and a bottle of wine, because, she said, the afternoons became less sad after a bottle of wine. Hugh didn't understand why a pretty twenty-two-year-old girl needed wine to keep her from being sad in the afternoons, but he didn't interfere.

While Clare was going over the wine card, Hugh took Morton's letter out of his pocket and read it. Morton was asking for 250 dollars. It seemed that he had borrowed a fraternity brother's Plymouth and gone into a ditch with it after a dance and the repairs had come to 125 dollars. There had been a girl with him, too, and her nose had been broken and the doctor had charged a hundred dollars for the nose and Morton had promised to pay. Then, there was ten dollars for two books in a course on ethics and fifteen dollars just, as Morton phrased it, to make it a round number. Hugh put the letter back in his pocket without saying anything about it to Clare. At least, Hugh thought, it wasn't as bad as last year, when it looked as though Morton was going to be kicked out of school for cheating on a calculus examination.

As Clare ate her chicken and drank her wine, she told her father what was troubling her. Mostly, it was Freddie, her husband. She was undecided, she said as she ate away steadily at her chicken, whether to leave him or have a baby. She was sure Freddie was seeing another woman, on East Seventy-eighth Street, in the afternoons, and before she took a step in either direction she wanted Hugh to confront Freddie man to man and get a statement of intentions from him. Freddie wouldn't talk to her. Whenever she brought the subject up, he left the house and went to a hotel for the night. If it was to be a divorce, she would need at

least a thousand dollars from Hugh for the six weeks in Reno, because Freddie had already told her he wouldn't advance a cent for any damn thing like that. Besides, Freddie was having a little financial trouble at the moment. He had overdrawn against his account at the automobile agency for which he worked, and they had clamped down on him two weeks ago. If they had the baby, the doctor Clare wanted would cost 800 dollars, and there would be at least another 500 for the hospital and nurses, and she knew she could depend on Daddy for that.

She drank her wine and talked on as Hugh ate silently. Freddie, she said, was also five months behind in his dues and greens fees at the golf club, and they were going to post his name if he didn't pay by Sunday, and that was *really* urgent, because of the disgrace, and Freddie had behaved like an absolute savage around the house ever since he received the letter from the club secretary.

'I told him,' Clare said, with tears in her eyes and eating steadily, 'I told him I would gladly go out and work, but he said he'd be damned if he'd let people say he couldn't support his own wife, and, of course, you have to respect a feeling like that. And he told me he wouldn't come to you for another cent, either, and you can't help admiring him for that, can you?'

'No,' Hugh said, remembering that his son-in-law had borrowed from him, over a period of four years, 3850 dollars and had not paid back a cent. 'No, you can't. Did he know you were going to come and talk to me today?'

'Vaguely,' Clare said, and poured herself another glass of wine. As she carefully harvested the last bits of apple and walnut from her salad, Clare said she didn't really like to burden him with her problems but he was the only one in the whole world whose judgement she really trusted. He was so solid and sensible and smart, she said, and she didn't know any more whether she really loved Freddie or not and she was so confused and she hated to see Freddie so unhappy all the time about money and she wanted to know whether Hugh honestly felt she was ready for motherhood at the age of twenty-two. By the time they finished their coffee, Hugh had promised to talk to Freddie very soon about the woman on Seventy-eighth Street and to underwrite either the trip

to Reno or the obstetrician, as the case may be, and he had made a half promise about the back dues and the greens fees.

On the way to the office, Hugh bought an alligator handbag for Narcisse for sixty dollars and worried sharply, for a moment, about inflation as he wrote out the cheque and handed it to the sales girl.

It was a little difficult to work after lunch, because he kept thinking about Clare and what she had been like as a little girl (measles at four, mumps the year after, braces from eleven to fifteen, acne between fourteen and seventeen). He worked very slowly on Sorrento. Mr Gorsline came in twice during the afternoon. The first time he said, 'Still on Sorrento?' and the second time he said, 'Who the hell cares if that Communist Russian wrote a book there?'

In addition to the usual sensation in the groin, Hugh noticed a quickening of his breath, which was almost a gasp, when Mr Gorsline stood behind him during the afternoon.

After work, he went into the little bar on Lexington Avenue where he met Jean three times a week. She was sitting there, finishing her first whisky, and he sat down beside her and squeezed her hand in greeting. They had been in love for eleven years now, but he had kissed her only once (V-E Day), because she had been a classmate of Narcisse's at Bryn Mawr and they had decided early in the game to be honourable. She was a tall, majestic woman who, because she had led a troubled life, still looked comparatively young. They sat sadly and secretly in sad little bars late in the afternoon and talked in low, nostalgic tones about how different everything could have been. In the beginning, their conversation had been more animated, and for a half hour at a time Hugh had recovered some of the optimism and confidence that he had had as a young man who had taken all the honours at college, before it had become apparent that a retentive memory and talent and intelligence and luck were not all the same thing.

'I think, very soon,' Jean said while he was sipping his drink, 'we'll have to give this up. It isn't going anywhere, really, is it,

and I just don't feel right about it. I feel guilty. Don't you?'

Until then, it hadn't occurred to Hugh that he had done anything to feel guilty about, with the possible exception of the kiss on V-E Day. But now that Jean had said it, he realized that he probably would feel guilty from now on, every time he entered the bar and saw her sitting there.

'Yes,' he said sadly. 'I suppose you're right.'

'I'm going away for the summer,' Jean said. 'In June. When I come back I'm not going to see you any more.'

Hugh nodded miserably. The summer was still five months away, but behind him he had a sense of something slipping, with a rustling noise, like a curtain coming down.

He had to stand in the subway all the way home, and the car was so crowded that he couldn't turn the pages of his newspaper. He read and re-read the front page, thinking, I certainly am glad I wasn't elected President.

It was hot in the train, and he felt fat and uncomfortable jammed among the travellers, and he had a new, uneasy feeling that his flesh was overburdening him. Then, just before he came to Two hundred and forty-second Street, he realized that he had left the alligator bag on his desk in the office. He felt a little tickle of terror in his throat and knees. It was not so much that, empty-handed, he faced an evening of domestic sighs, half-spoken reproaches, and almost certain tears. It was not even so much the fact that he mistrusted the cleaning woman who did his office every night and who had once (3 November, 1950), he was sure, taken a dollar and thirty cents' worth of airmail stamps from the upper right-hand drawer. But, standing there in the now uncrowded car, he had to face the fact that twice in one day he had forgotten something. He couldn't remember when anything like that had ever happened to him. He touched his head with his fingertips, as though there might be some obscure explanation to be found that way. He decided to give up drinking. He drank only five or six whiskies a week, but the induction of partial amnesia by alcohol was a well-established medical principle, and perhaps his level of tolerance was abnormally low.

The evening passed as he had expected. He bought some roses at the station for Narcisse, but he couldn't tell her about the

alligator bag left on his desk, because he figured, correctly, that that would only compound the morning's offence. He even suggested that they return to the city for an anniversary dinner, but Narcisse had had the whole day alone to augment her self-pity and brood upon her martyrdom, and she insisted on eating the fish, which had cost ninety-three cents a pound. By ten-thirty she was crying.

Hugh slept badly and got to the office early the next morning, but even the sight of the alligator bag, left squarely in the middle of the desk by the cleaning woman, did not raise his spirits. During the day he forgot the names of three of Sophocles' plays (*Oedipus at Colonus*, *Trachiniae* and *Philoctetes*) and the telephone number of his dentist.

It started that way. Hugh began to make more and more frequent trips to the reference library on the thirteenth floor, dreading the trip through the office, because of the way his fellow-workers commenced to look at him, curious and puzzled, as he traversed the room again and again in the course of an hour. One day he forgot the titles of the works of Sardou, the area of Santo Domingo, the symptoms of silicosis, the definition of syndrome, and the occasion of the mortification of Saint Simeon Stylites.

Hoping it would pass, he said nothing about it to anyone – not even to Jean, in the little bar on Lexington Avenue.

Mr Gorsline took to standing for longer and longer periods behind Hugh's desk, and Hugh sat there, pretending to be working, pretending he didn't look haggard, his jowls hanging from his cheekbones like gallows ropes, his brain feeling like a piece of frozen meat that was being nibbled by a wolf. Once, Mr Gorsline muttered something about hormones, and once, at four-thirty, he told Hugh to take the afternoon off. Hugh had worked for Mr Gorsline for eighteen years and this was the first time Mr Gorsline had told him to take an afternoon off. When Mr Gorsline left his office, Hugh sat at his desk, staring blindly into terrifying depths.

One morning, some days after the anniversary, Hugh forgot the name of his morning newspaper. He stood in front of the newsvendor, staring down at the ranked *Times* and *Tribunes* and

News and *Mirrors*, and they all looked the same to him. He knew that for the past twenty-five years he had been buying the same paper each morning, but now there was no clue for him in their makeup or in the headlines as to which one it was. He bent down and peered more closely at the papers. The President, a headline announced, was to speak that night. As Hugh straightened up, he realized he no longer remembered the President's name or whether he was a Republican or a Democrat. For a moment, he experienced what could be described only as an exquisite pang of pleasure. But he knew it was deceptive, like the ecstasy described by T. E. Lawrence on the occasion when he was beaten nearly to death by the Turks.

He bought a copy of *Holiday* and stared numbly at the coloured photographs of distant cities all the way down to the office. That morning, he forgot the date on which John L. Sullivan won the heavyweight championship of the world, and the name of the inventor of the submarine. He also had to go to the reference library because he wasn't sure whether Santander was in Chile or Spain.

He was sitting at his desk that afternoon, staring at his hands, because for an hour he had had the feeling that mice were running between his fingers, when his son-in-law came into the office.

'Hi, Hughie, old boy,' his son-in-law said. From the very first night his son-in-law had appeared at the house, he had been unfalteringly breezy with Hugh.

Hugh stood up and said 'Hello—' and stopped. He stared at his son-in-law. He knew it was his son-in-law. He knew it was Clare's husband. But he couldn't remember the man's name. For the second time that day he experienced the trilling wave of pleasure that he had felt at the newsstand when he realized he had forgotten the name and political affiliations of the President of the United States. Only this time it seemed to last. It lasted while he shook hands with his son-in-law, and all during the trip down the elevator with him, and it lasted in the bar next door while he bought his son-in-law three Martinis.

'Hughie, old boy,' his son-in-law said during the third Martini,

'let's get down to cases. Clare said you had a problem you wanted to talk to me about. Spit it out, old boy, and let's get it over with. What have you got on your mind?'

Hugh looked hard at the man across the table. He searched his brain conscientiously, but he couldn't think of a single problem that might possibly involve them. 'No,' Hugh said slowly, 'I have nothing in particular on my mind.'

His son-in-law kept looking at Hugh belligerently while Hugh was paying for the drinks, but Hugh merely hummed under his breath, smiling slightly at the waitress. Outside, where they stood for a moment, his son-in-law cleared his throat once and said, 'Now, look here, old boy, if it's about—' but Hugh shook his hand warmly and walked briskly away, feeling deft and limber.

But back in his office, looking down at his cluttered desk, his sense of well-being left him. He had moved on to the 'T's by now, and as he looked at the scraps of paper and the jumble of books on his desk, he realized that he had forgotten a considerable number of facts about Tacitus and was completely lost on the subject of Taine. There was a sheet of notepaper on his desk with the date and the beginning of a salutation: 'Dear . . .'

He stared at the paper and tried to remember who it was he had been writing to. It was five minutes before it came to him; the letter was to have been to his son, and he had meant, finally, to enclose the cheque for the 250 dollars, as requested. He felt in his inside pocket for his cheque book. It wasn't there. He looked carefully through all the drawers of his desk, but the cheque book wasn't there, either. Shaking a little, because this was the first time in his life that he had misplaced a cheque book, he decided to call up his bank and ask them to mail him a new book. He picked up the phone. Then he stared at it blankly. He had forgotten the telephone number of the bank. He put the phone down and opened the classified telephone directory to 'B'. Then he stopped. He swallowed dryly. He had forgotten the name of his bank. He looked at the page of banks. All the names seemed vaguely familiar to him, but no one name seemed to have any special meaning for him. He closed the book and stood up and went over to the window. He looked out. There were two pigeons sitting on the sill, looking cold, and across the street a bald man

was standing at a window in the building opposite, smoking a cigarette and staring down as though he were contemplating suicide.

Hugh went back to his desk and sat down. Perhaps it was an omen, he thought, the thing about the cheque book. Perhaps it was a sign that he ought to take a sterner line with his son. Let him pay for his own mistakes for once. He picked up his pen, resolved to write this to Alabama. 'Dear . . .' he read. He looked for a long time at the word. Then he carefully closed his pen and put it back in his pocket. He no longer remembered his son's name.

He put on his coat and went out, although it was only three-twenty-five. He walked all the way up to the Museum, striding lightly, feeling better and better with each block. By the time he reached the Museum, he felt like a man who has just been told that he has won a hundred-dollar bet on a fourteen-to-one shot. In the Museum, he went and looked at the Egyptians. He had meant to look at the Egyptians for years, but he had always been too busy.

When he got through with the Egyptians, he felt wonderful. He continued feeling wonderful all the way home in the subway. He no longer made any attempt to buy the newspapers. They didn't make any sense to him. He didn't recognize any of the people whose names appeared in the columns. It was like reading the Karachi *Sind Observer* or the Sonora *El Mundo*. Not having a paper in his hands made the long ride much more agreeable. He spent his time in the subway looking at the people around him. The people in the subway seemed much more interesting, much more pleasant, now that he no longer read in the newspapers what they were doing to each other.

Of course, once he opened his front door, his euphoria left him. Narcisse had taken to looking at him very closely in the evenings, and he had to be very careful with his conversation. He didn't want Narcisse to discover what was happening to him. He didn't want her to worry, to try to cure him. He sat all evening listening to the gramophone, but he forgot to change the record. It was an automatic machine and it played the last record of the

second Saint-Saëns piano concerto seven times before Narcisse came in from the kitchen and said, 'I'm going out of my mind,' and turned it off.

He went to bed early. He heard Narcisse crying in the next bed. It was the third time that month. There were between two and five more times to go. He remembered that.

The next afternoon he was working on Talleyrand. He was bent over his desk, working slowly but not too badly, when he became conscious that there was someone standing behind him. He swung in his chair. A grey-haired man in a tweed suit was standing there, staring down at him.

'Yes?' Hugh said curtly. 'Are you looking for someone?'

The man, surprisingly, turned red, then went out of the room, slamming the door behind him. Hugh shrugged incuriously and turned back to Talleyrand.

The elevator was crowded when he left for the day, and the hall downstairs was thronged with clerks and secretaries hurrying out of the building. Near the entrance, a very pretty girl was standing, and she smiled and waved at Hugh over the heads of the homeward-bound office workers. Hugh stopped for an instant, flattered, and was tempted to smile back. But he had a date with Jean, and anyway he was too old for anything like that. He set his face and hurried out in the stream of people. He thought he heard a kind of wail, which sounded curiously like 'Daddy', but he knew that was impossible, and didn't turn around.

He went to Lexington Avenue, enjoying the shining winter evening, and started north. He passed two bars and was approaching a third when he slowed down. He retraced his steps, peering at the bar fronts. They all had chromium on them, and neon lights, and they all looked the same. There was another bar across the street. He went and looked at the bar across the street, but it was just like the others. He went into it, anyway, but Jean wasn't there. He ordered a whisky, standing at the bar, and asked the bartender, 'Have you seen a lady alone in here in the last half hour?'

The bartender looked up at the ceiling, thinking. 'What she look like?' he asked.

'She—' Hugh stopped. He sipped his drink. 'Never mind,' he said to the bartender. He laid a dollar bill on the counter and went out.

Walking over to the subway station he felt better than he had felt since he won the hundred-yard dash at the age of eleven at the annual field day of the Brigham Young Public School in Salt Lake City on 9 June, 1915.

The feeling lasted, of course, only until Narcisse put the soup on the table. Her eyes were puffed, and she had obviously been crying that afternoon, which was curious, because Narcisse never cried when she was alone. Eating his dinner, conscious of Narcisse watching him closely across the table, Hugh began to feel the mice between his fingers again. After dinner, Narcisse said, 'You can't fool me. There's another woman.' She also said, 'I never thought this would happen to me.'

By the time Hugh went to bed, he felt like a passenger on a badly loaded freighter in a winter storm off Cape Hatteras.

He awoke early, conscious that it was a sunny day outside. He lay in bed, feeling warm and healthy. There was a noise from the next bed, and he looked across the little space. There was a woman in the next bed. She was middle-aged and was wearing curlers and she was snoring and Hugh was certain he had never seen her before in his life. He got out of bed silently, dressed quickly, and went out into the sunny day.

Without thinking about it, he walked to the subway station. He watched the people hurrying towards the trains and he knew that he probably should join them. He had the feeling that somewhere in the city to the south, in some tall building on a narrow street, his arrival was expected. But he knew that no matter how hard he tried he would never be able to find the building. Buildings these days, it occurred to him suddenly, were too much like other buildings.

He walked briskly away from the subway station in the direction of the river. The river was shining in the sun and there was ice along the banks. A boy of about twelve, in a plaid mackinaw and a wool hat, was sitting on a bench and regarding the river.

There were some school books, tied with a leather strap, on the frozen ground at his feet.

Hugh sat down next to the boy. 'Good morning,' he said pleasantly.

'Good morning,' said the boy.

'What are you doing?' Hugh asked.

'I'm counting the boats,' the boy said. 'Yesterday I counted thirty-two boats. Not counting ferries. I don't count ferries.'

Hugh nodded. He put his hands in his pockets and looked down over the river. By five o'clock that afternoon he and the boy had counted forty-three boats, not including ferries. He couldn't remember having had a nicer day.